



Prime Minister's Address to the Knesset

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His Excellency, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

His Excellency, Mr. Amir Ohana, Speaker of the Knesset,

His Excellency, Mr. Yair Lapid, Leader of the Opposition,

Hon'ble Members of the Knesset,

My dear sisters and brothers,

Shalom!

Namaste!

Hon'ble Members,

It is a privilege and an honour for me to stand before this distinguished House. I do so as the Prime Minister of India, and also as a representative of one ancient civilisation addressing another. I bring with me the greetings of 1.4 billion Indians, and a message of friendship, respect, and partnership.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your kind invitation. And for your wonderful gesture of lighting up the Knesset in Indian colours. Your visit to India three years ago was the first by a Speaker of the Knesset. And thanks to you, I am the first Prime Minister of India to address this august gathering.

Nine years ago, I had the good fortune to be the first Prime Minister of India to visit Israel. And I am very happy to be here again, returning to a land to which I have always felt drawn. Afterall, I was born on the same day that India formally recognized Israel – September 17, 1950!

Hon'ble Members,

I also carry with me the deepest condolences of the people of India for every life lost and for every family whose world was shattered in the barbaric terrorist attack by Hamas on "October 7". We feel your pain. We share your grief. India stands with Israel, firmly, with full conviction, in this moment, and beyond.

No cause can justify the murder of civilians. Nothing can justify terrorism.

India has also endured the pain of terrorism for a long time. We remember the 26/11 Mumbai attacks and the innocent lives lost, including Israeli citizens. Like you, we have a consistent and uncompromising

policy of zero tolerance for terrorism, with no double standards.

Terrorism aims to destabilise societies, to block development, and to erode trust. Countering terrorism requires sustained and coordinated global action, because terror anywhere threatens peace everywhere. That is why, India supports all efforts that contribute to durable peace and regional stability.

Some years ago, when you concluded the Abraham Accords, we applauded your courage and vision. It was a moment of new hope for a long-troubled region. Since then, the situation has changed significantly. The path is even more challenging. Yet it is important to sustain that hope.

The Gaza Peace Initiative that was endorsed by the UN Security Council offers a pathway. India has expressed its firm support for the initiative. We believe that it holds the promise of a just and durable peace for all the people of the region, including by addressing the Palestine Issue.

Let all our efforts be guided by wisdom, courage, and humanity. The road to peace is not always easy. But India joins you and the world for dialogue, peace and stability in this region.

Hon'ble Members,

In India, there is great admiration for Israel's resolve, courage, and achievements. Long before we related to each other as modern States, we were linked by ties that go back more than two thousand years. The Book of Esther refers to India as Hodu. The Talmud records trade with India in ancient times.

Jewish merchants travelled across sea routes that connected the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. They came seeking opportunity and dignity. And, in India, they became one of us.

Jewish communities have lived in India without fear of persecution or discrimination. They have preserved their faith and participated fully in society. That record is a source of pride for us.

Hon'ble Members,

The Bene Israel of Maharashtra, the Cochini Jews of Keralam, the Baghdadi Jews of Kolkata and Mumbai, and the Bnei Menashe of the North East have enriched India. In my home state Gujarat, there is a school set-up by a Bene Israeli family - Mister and Missus Best. It is an excellent school, and of course, it is called the Best School!

Edwyn Myers gave shape to the Films Division of India and was a towering figure in the history of Indian cinema. Doctor Reuben David was the founder of the Kankaria Zoo in Ahmedabad. The actor David Abraham Cheulkar, or Uncle David, became a household name across the country. Walter Kaufmann composed the signature tune for All India Radio. David Sassoon built many institutions that still serve Indian society.

And, of course, the heroic contribution of Lt. General J.F.R. Jacob during the 1971 war with Pakistan is widely known. I had the honour of working closely with him after his retirement. We discussed India-Israel relations, among many other things, over many cups of tea. There have been countless others whose contributions are woven into India's rich fabric of life.

Hon'ble Members,

There was movement from India to Israel too, when many Indian Jews migrated to Israel in the mid twentieth century. Today, a vibrant Indian-origin Jewish community lives here. They have contributed to the building of modern Israel, in laboratories and hospitals, in classrooms, and also on the battlefield. They hold firmly that Israel is their fatherland and India their motherland. We are proud of them.

Hon'ble Members,

India's connection to this land is also written in blood and sacrifice. During the First World War, more than four thousand Indian soldiers laid down their lives in this region. The cavalry charge at Haifa in September 1918 remains a significant chapter in military history.

Major Thakur Dalpat Singh, remembered as the Hero of Haifa, symbolises this shared history. During my last visit, I was deeply moved to pay my respects at the Haifa memorial for Indian soldiers.

Hon'ble Members,

Last month, the world marked the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Holocaust stands as one of humanity's darkest chapters. Yet, even in those turbulent years, some acts of humanity stood out. The Maharaja of Nawanagar in Gujarat, also known as the Jam Saheb, offered refuge to Polish children, including Jewish children, who had nowhere else to turn. I am told that a statue of Jam Saheb was unveiled in Moshav Nevatim recently.

Thank you. Thank you, for this honour and remembrance.

Hon'ble Members,

After India's independence, many Indian leaders felt a kinship with the people of Israel. India's parliamentary debates of the 1950s are witness to their admiration for Israel's efforts to develop agriculture in the desert. The Kibbutz movement of Israel inspired our leaders like Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan. First in my home state Gujarat, and now across India, I have seen the approach of "Per Drop, More Crop" work wonders in agriculture.

My own first visit to Israel was in 2006, as the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Later, in 2017, during my visit to Israel as Prime Minister, our two countries elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership. Since then, our engagement has expanded in scale and scope. And we are committed to further consolidate this relationship across many sectors.

Hon'ble Members,

For the last few years, India has been the fastest-growing major economy in the world. Soon, we will be among the top three economies globally. At the same time, Israel is a powerhouse of innovation and technological leadership. This creates a natural foundation for a forward-looking partnership.

We are committed to expanding trade, strengthening investment flows, and promoting joint infrastructure development. The Bilateral Investment Treaty signed last year will provide confidence and predictability to our businesses.

In the last few years, India has concluded a number of important trade agreements with other nations. To your West, the European Union, and the UK. To your East, the UAE and Oman.

Our bilateral goods trade has grown manifold in recent years. But, it does not reflect the full scope of opportunity. That is why our teams are working hard to negotiate an ambitious Free Trade Agreement. It will unlock the vast untapped potential in our trade relationship.

We will also work closely in different formats such as the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor and the I2U2 framework between India, Israel, UAE and the US. Defence and Security is another important pillar of our partnership. In November last year, we signed an MOU on Defence Cooperation. In today's uncertain world, a strong defence partnership between trusted partners like India and Israel is of vital importance.

Hon'ble Members,

Israel is often called the "start-up nation". In recent years, we have also been working to unlock the innovation and creativity of our youth. I recall that in 2018, Prime Minister Netanyahu and I inaugurated the iCreate Technology Business Incubator in India. Since then, it has supported nearly 900 such start-ups.

Last week, we hosted the world's largest and most democratised AI Impact Summit, with representatives from over 100 countries. Our aspirational spirit aligns naturally with Israel's innovation ecosystem. I see a lot of synergies in areas such as quantum technologies, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence. We are also working with Israel on creating cross-border financial linkages using our Digital Public Infrastructure.

Hon'ble Members,

I mentioned how inspiring we found Israel's agricultural miracle in the desert. Israeli expertise in precision irrigation and water management has already transformed agricultural practices in India.

Together, we have established 43 Centres of Excellence across India that have provided training to more than half a million farmers. We should now set an ambitious goal of expanding to 100 Centres to benefit millions of farmers and fishermen.

Hon'ble Members,

At the heart of the India-Israel partnership are the ties between our peoples. When I first visited Israel in 2006, there were a handful of Yoga centres in Israel. Today, Yoga seems to be practiced in almost every neighbourhood!

I am told that interest in Ayurveda is also growing in Israel. I invite more and more young Israelis to travel to India. They will witness the dynamism of our society, and experience what holistic wellness can do for the body and the mind.

I am happy to inform this august house that the Indian Parliament has set-up a Parliamentary Friendship Group for Israel. I invite you all to visit India and look forward to having more exchanges between our Members of Parliament.

I am aware that Indian caregivers and skilled workers in Israel contribute immensely to families and communities. They have displayed remarkable courage and dedication in times of crisis, including on October 7. We are proud of them.

As the Jewish teaching reminds us, "Whoever saves one life, saves the entire world." Their service reflects the strength of the human bonds behind our cooperation. We will continue to facilitate the movement of workers and professionals across sectors that benefit both of our nations.

Hon'ble Members,

We are both ancient civilizations. And it is perhaps no surprise that our civilisational traditions also reveal philosophical parallels. In Israel, the principle of Tikkun Olam speaks of healing the world. In India, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam affirms that the world is one family. Both ideas extend responsibility beyond immediate boundaries. They ask societies to act with compassion and moral courage.

Judaism emphasises Halakha, guiding everyday conduct through law and practice. Hindu philosophy speaks of Dharma, the moral order that shapes duty and right action. In both traditions, ethical life is lived through action, and faith is expressed through conduct.

There is an endearing similarity in our festivals as well. You celebrate Hanukkah with the warm glow of candles. Around the same time, we celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights, with the gentle radiance of lamps. Soon, India will celebrate the festival of Holi, filled with happiness and colour. And around the same time, Israel will also celebrate Purim with enthusiasm and joy.

Hon'ble Members,

Our shared ideals are the deep foundations that give strength to our modern partnership. We are democracies shaped by history and focused on the future. Our partnership is grounded in shared experience and shared aspirations. Our strong partnership not only serves national interests but also contributes to global stability and prosperity.

Let us ensure that the friendship between India and Israel remains a source of strength in an uncertain world.

Am Yisrael Chai.

Jai Hind.

Thank you.

MJPS/PKK

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